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Citation for published version:

Popa, D 2019, 'Hopeless didacticism: Archival sources and spectatorial address in 'I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians'', *Law, Culture and the Humanities*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1743872119880313>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1177/1743872119880313](https://doi.org/10.1177/1743872119880313)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Law, Culture and the Humanities

Publisher Rights Statement:

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<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1743872119880313>

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Hopeless Didacticism: Archival Sources and Spectatorial Address in “*I Do Not Care if We Go Down in History as Barbarians*”

This paper, situated at the intersection of film studies, social and political sciences, analyses “*Îmi este indiferent dacă în istorie vom intra ca barbari*” / “*I Do Not Care if We Go Down in History as Barbarians*”¹ (hereafter “*Barbarians*”) a film that explores the persistence of problematic official narratives about the Romanian participation in WWII. It follows a young theatre director as she prepares to stage a fictional re-enactment of a particularly shameful event, the massacre of Jews at Odessa in 1941. I argue that “*Barbarians*” is a *dispositif* film in which formal elements combine with a variety of heterogeneous media, such as archival photography and footage, to provide “evidence” about the past while also reflecting on historical truth’s fragility to propagandistic manipulation and the role that media, film included, can play in it.

Using close analysis and drawing on recent theorising on the cinematic *dispositif*, I examine the ways in which “*Barbarians*” encourages complex text-viewer relationships that originate in but are not exhausted by the use of direct address. I apply Adrian Martin’s expansive notion of *dispositif*, which includes the film’s form and content in order to show how, through a series of procedures, the film’s tone gradually shifts from didacticism about a political past to a multivocality of political memory. I argue that the film thwarts spectators’ expectation of being presented with a “final truth” and reveals the inevitable multitude of perspectives about the past, highlighting the risks of failure that any attempt to “fix memory” will face.

¹ Radu Jude, “*Îmi este indiferent dacă în istorie vom intra ca barbari*”, film (Romania, Germany, Bulgaria, France, Czech Republic, 2018).

“Barbarians” is set in the present, in post-communist Romania, but its subject matter revolves around a historical event that took place during WWII, the massacre of Jews at Odessa by the Romanian army. The title of the film quotes a sentence taken from a political speech made during the war, which details the Romanian Government’s plans for ethnic cleansing via population exchange, deportation, and murder. Thus, the film reenacts not only the brutal killings of Jews by shooting, hanging and burning but also, and more significantly, the anti-Semitic and anti-Roma nationalism that allowed for this event to happen.

The film’s post-communist, i.e. present, perspective on the Holocaust is significant for two reasons. First, it foregrounds the continuous erasure of the crimes perpetrated by the Romanian army against Jews on the Eastern Front. Second, drawing attention to this erasure highlights the continuities between the politics of memory institutionalised by communist and post-communist official historiographies. In this context, *“Barbarians”* intervenes into the debates on the memory of the Holocaust and reveals negationism as one among many other positions on the Holocaust. In doing so, it explores the limits of the official efforts to build a public consensus on the Holocaust through the work of the International Commission on the Holocaust, whose Final Report was published in 2005.

In the first part, the paper looks at the history and memory of the Holocaust in Romania across two distinct periods: during the communist dictatorship that followed WWII and after the fall of communism in 1989, in order to track the development of post-WWII official narratives. I discuss the Final Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust² and its limited legal and political impact in post-communist Romania. As I argue, the film brings to the attention of a wider audience the limited impact of legally and officially sanctioned truth in effecting change.

² International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, *Final Report of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania* (Iași, Polirom, 2005).

In the second part, I turn to Adrian Martin's recent theorising on the cinematic *dispositif*. Martin's reappraisal of the notion of *dispositif* allows me to look at "*Barbarians*" as a film akin to conceptual art, that makes its procedure visible from its beginning: the "film-within-film" procedure. Martin considers the formal, conceptual characteristics of films in order to define the *dispositif* as "a game with rules."³ Such an approach allows me to look at the *dispositif* of "*Barbarians*" as a dynamic procedure with three variations: "image-within-image", "screen-within-screen" and "spectacle-within-spectacle". This procedure generates the object of the third part of the paper. The film uses a "behind-the-scenes" backstory to motivate the narrative of the film as an attempt to "document" the process of staging a public show, on the basis of archival, visual and written material. In relation to the use of archival photography in the film, I first examine the way in which the "image-within-image", "screen-within-screen" and "spectacle-within-spectacle" variations of the *dispositif* contribute to developing the film's argument about multivocal memory. This multivocality, however, emerges within the Romanian ethnic and religious Orthodox majority (hereafter majority), excluding the Jewish, Roma or other ethnic minorities, who have historically inhabited the territory of Romania and have participated in this history. The film's emphasis on the ethnic Romanian perspective is suggestive of the educational intention behind the project in tune with Mariana's, the fictional theatre director in the film, desire to provoke a reckoning with this past. Significantly, the film allows multiple, often contradictory, perspectives to coexist within the majoritarian group, thus problematising the power of politically manipulated or officially sanctioned narratives to muster a unity of memory within the "nation".

³ Adrian Martin, *Mise En Scène and Film Style* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 179

The Persistence of Communist and Post-Communist Perspectives on the Holocaust in Romania: Historical, Legal and Socio-Political Context

During the initial stages of the Second World War, Romania was formally neutral, but in 1940 under the military dictator, Marshal Ion Antonescu, the country joined in the Nazi invasion of the USSR.⁴ Consequently, Romania recovered Bessarabia and Bukovina, territories that the USSR had annexed earlier that year, and added Transnistria, an area seized from Soviet Ukraine.⁵ Romanians carried out mass killings of Jews in Transnistria. Importantly, they also ethnically cleansed the Roma and Sinti in these territories.⁶ One of the best-documented atrocities occurred in Odessa in 1941. Romanian troops organised “reprisals” for an explosion that destroyed their headquarters in the city: they burned alive nineteen thousand Jews, while many others were shot or hanged.⁷ In total, between 280,000 and 380,000 Jews, and 12,500 Roma were killed by Romanians in these territories.⁸

Pogroms also took place on the territory of Romania. Independently of German influence, Romania pursued national purification, as attested by the 1941 massacres in Bucharest and Iași. As Judt points out, “the project to get rid of the Jews was intimately tied to the long-standing urge to ‘Romanianize’ the country in a way that was not true of anti-Semitism anywhere else in the region.”⁹ Historians agree that Romania is second only to Germany in their “contribution” to the Holocaust.¹⁰ The official policy changed in 1942: by the summer, Romania was no longer deporting Jews to Transnistria and refused to send its Jews to the camps. This change allowed for negotiations with the Allies, which resulted in

⁴ Tony Judt, *Reappraisals: Reflections on the Forgotten Twentieth Century* (London, Vintage, 2009), p. 254.

⁵ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (London, Bodley Head, 2010), p. 218.

⁶ Op. cit., p. 276.

⁷ Judt, *Reappraisals*, p. 255.

⁸ Judt, *Reappraisals*; Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies Under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944* (Chicago, Ivan R. Dee, 2000); Snyder, *Bloodlands*.

⁹ Judt, *Reappraisals*, p. 255. To this day, Romania is an ethnically mixed country where Hungarians, Roma and Sinti, alongside Germans (Saxons and Swabians) represent its largest minorities. Since its formation as an independent state in 1918, Romanian nationalist leaders insisted on defining it as an ethnically homogenous country, an attitude reflected in the current constitution. Art 1 of the Constitution (2003) defines Romania as a national and unitary state.

¹⁰ ICHiR, *Final Report*; Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*; Judt, *Reappraisals*; Snyder, *Bloodlands*.

Romania switching sides in August 1944 and ending the war on the side of the victors.¹¹ Soon after, the communists seized power in Romania.

The communist regime projected the memory of World War II as a turning point in the relationship with the USSR. From 1947,¹² Romanian communists condemned Romania's participation in the invasion of the USSR. The Red Army was presented as the glorious liberator of the Romanian people. The official post World War II communist history tried to diminish or decline responsibility for the mass massacre of Jews, blaming instead the Germans, Ion Antonescu alone or the members of the fascist organisation, the Iron Guard. In the first two decades of communist rule, this was the only permissible narrative about World War II: in the 1950s, dissenting from it could have led to incarceration.

In the 1980s, against the background of communist leader Nicolae Ceaușescu's hyper-nationalistic politics, the official narrative on the war changed. Historians aligned with the Communist Party, its History Institute and the National Military Museum described Romania's position during the war as patriotic and protective of the country's territorial integrity. This vision bore similarities to the right-wing war propaganda which, in 1941, presented Antonescu's alliance with Hitler as instrumental for liberating Bessarabia and Bukovina from the USSR's dominion. In this context, the National Military Museum emerges as a privileged site and repository of official history, where the hegemonic political view of the period is materially represented. Not accidentally, it also serves as a key location in the film.

The national communist perspective on World War II was reproduced after the collapse of communism, when the Social Democratic Party (the successor party of the Communist Party) came to power. Antonescu was rehabilitated as an anti-communist patriot.

¹¹ Snyder, *Bloodlands*, pp. 218-19

¹² I rely heavily here on Claudia-Florentina Dobre, 'Remembering World War II: Public Discourse, Monuments, and Personal Narratives in Romania', in Justyna Budzinska, Edyta Glowacka-Sobech, Bernaette Jonda, Eds., *Niepamięć Wojny. Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia w XX/XXI Wieku* (Poznań, Adam Mickiewicz University, 2017), pp. 389-401.

At the same time, former political detainees were martyred as anti-communist heroes, fascists included. In this way, the fascist anti-communist resistance following WWII and anti-communist dissidents were collapsed into the same category. As Maria Bucur suggestively put it “everyone [became] a victim.”¹³ Immediately after 1989, in Romania, anti-communism emerged as the dominant framework for approaching the recent communist past. Florin Poenaru argues that the hegemony of post-communist anti-communism remained largely unchallenged for almost two decades after 1989¹⁴. Poenaru shows that the main proponents of “post-communist anti-communism” were intellectuals, former members of a group active in the 1980s in Romania, known as the School of Păltiniș, and who became the dominant figures of the transition period.¹⁵ The anti-communist position of these intellectuals is not unproblematic. In an attempt to forge an intellectual genealogy untainted by the communist past, this anti-communist intellectual elite depicted the inter-war period as the Romanian golden age prior to communism,¹⁶ conveniently forgetting about the anti-Semitism not only of the government of the times but also of the cultural elites of the period, including world-famous intellectuals such as Mircea Eliade and Emil Cioran, who were successfully reintroduced in the Romanian cultural canon after 1989.

We can safely conclude that, to a large extent, communist myth-making, combined with the regime’s blocking access to the archives of 1941-1944¹⁷ and the hegemony of often anti-Semitic anti-communism as a dominant framework for understanding the past for two decades after 1989 entrenched the erasure of the memory of the Holocaust and contributed to perpetuating denial, postponing Romania’s public reckoning with its participation in it.

¹³ Maria Bucur, ‘Everyone a Victim. Forging the Mythology of Anti-Communism counter-Memory’ in *Heroes and Victims. Remembering War in Twentieth-Century Romania* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2009), p. 194-222

¹⁴ Florin Poenaru, ‘Contesting Illusions. History and Intellectual Class Struggle in Post-Communist Romania’, unpublished PhD Thesis, Central European University, 2013, p. 15 and p. 270-272

¹⁵ Op. cit., p. 11

¹⁶ Op. cit., p. 39

¹⁷ Dennis Deletant, ‘German-Romanian Relations, 1941-1944’, in *Hitler and His Allies in World War II* (New York, Routledge, 2007), p. 166.

Only in 2001, in the context of negotiations for admission to NATO and the European Union, did the issue of Romania's participation in WWII and Holocaust negationism come to the forefront of political debates. This situation is not exceptional in the former Eastern bloc: throughout the region, the fall of communism marked "the beginning of memory." Gradually, "politically sensitive topics from the national past, subjects on which Communists were typically as silent as the nationalists" came to the fore.¹⁸ Thus, the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania was set up in 2003 to deal with the fascist past. In the wake of a post-communist wave of rehabilitating and celebrating Second World War criminals, most famously Marshal Antonescu¹⁹ himself, the Commission was mandated to offer irrefutable proof against the widespread denial of the Holocaust in Romania.²⁰ This time, Antonescu was finally condemned as a fascist for his policies towards Jews and Roma.

Importantly, in its final report, The Commission goes beyond its mandate. Chapter 5, entitled "Holocaust in Romania," fulfils the purpose of the mandate. It analyses the period between 1940 and 1944 and offers evidence of the large-scale discrimination of Jews, their mass murder and deportation carried out as a direct result of the Romanian government policies supported by large segments of the Romanian population. The full report, however, provides a documented history of anti-Semitism in Romania going back to the period of the formation of the Romanian modern state in 1877. It shows that anti-Semitism enjoyed widespread popular support before it became an official policy. Thus, anti-Semitism is shown to be integral to Romanian national sentiment. The report included recommendations referring to legislation, education, morality, museums and research, and it addressed the Romanian state and its authorities.²¹

¹⁸ Judt, *Reappraisals*, p. 254.

¹⁹ For a detailed list of rehabilitation events regarding WWII criminals see Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*, pp. 820-831.

²⁰ Ruxandra Cesereanu, 'The Final Report on the Holocaust and the Final Report on the Communist Dictatorship in Romania', *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures* 22 (2) (2008), p. 272

²¹ Op. cit., p. 278.

Mandatory Holocaust education in school was introduced in 1998. After 2004, references to the Holocaust in schoolbooks have become more coherent. Today, seventh-, tenth-, eleventh-, and twelfth-grade²² textbooks discuss the subject in the World War II module. Optional courses on Holocaust are also available. As the results of three public opinion polls suggest, the effect of these books is not yet visible in terms of changes in the public culture.²³

In Romania, the work of the International Commission for the Study of the Holocaust, in its capacity as a legal, institutional response to past injustices and human rights violations remained without much resonance.²⁴ I suggest that, while officially sanctioned by two Romanian presidents in 2003, the Final Report was poorly received for two main reasons. (1) the memory of the Holocaust was perceived as remote and with little relevance for the post-communist present.²⁵ This perception favoured studies of communism to the detriment of studies on fascism, anti-Semitism and the Holocaust: a “hierarchy of urgencies” was established²⁶ and a “competitive martyrology”²⁷ adjudicated in favour of the communist past. This led to the trivialization of the Holocaust, and even deflective and selective negationism.²⁸ (2) The hyper-nationalism characteristic of both communism and post-communism underpinned hegemonic definitions of the nation. Present nationalism in

²² In the Romanian educational system these classes consist of students between the ages of fourteen, sixteen, seventeen and eighteen.

²³ Felicia Waldman and Mihai Chioveanu, ‘Public Perceptions of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Romania’, in John-Paul Himka and Joanna B. Michlic, eds., *Bringing the Dark Past to Light. The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe*. (Lincoln & London, University of Nebraska Press, 2013), pp. 460-464 and pp. 475–77.

²⁴ Lavinia Stan, ‘Truth Commissions in Post-Communism: The Overlooked Solution?’, *The Open Political Science Journal* 2 (1) (2009), pp. 1–13; Lavinia Stan, *Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Romania: The Politics of Memory* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2012); Waldman and Chioveanu, *Public Perceptions*; Cesereanu, *The Final Report*; Monica Ciobanu, ‘Criminalising the Past and Reconstructing Collective Memory: The Romanian Truth Commission’, *Europe-Asia Studies* 61 (2) (2009), pp. 313–36; Monica Ciobanu, ‘The Challenge of Competing Pasts’, in Lavinia Stan and Nadya Nedelsky, eds., *Post-Communist Transitional Justice* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 148–66.

²⁵ Ciobanu, *The Romanian Truth Commission*, p. 153.

²⁶ Waldman and Chioveanu, *Public Perceptions*, p. 455.

²⁷ Michael Shafir, ‘Rotten Apples, Bitter Pears: An Updated Motivational Typology of Romania’s Radical Right’s Anti-Semitic Postures in Post-Communism’, *Journal for the Study of Religions & Ideologies* 7 (21) (2008), p. 151.

²⁸ Waldman and Chioveanu, *Public Perceptions*, p. 455.

Romania is a legacy of nationalist communism, itself rooted in “the xenophobic, anti-Semitic nationalism characteristic of the interwar period.”²⁹

Nationalism as an issue of the present is emphasised by the film too. First, “*Barbarians*” came out in 2018, when Romania celebrated 100 years since the founding of the contemporary Romanian state and nation. Second, the section of the film detailing the fictional reenactment of the massacre of Jews in Odessa, the fictional theatre director’s show, is entitled *Nașterea națiunii*, which translates as “the birth of the nation”. On the one hand, the association with D.W. Griffith’s seminal film with the same title is hard to miss. *The Birth of a Nation*³⁰ is a controversial film, famous for its aesthetic achievements, but also for its blatantly racist content which undermines its usefulness for educational purposes. On the other hand, the reenactment of the massacre of Jews in the film captures “the birth of the Romanian nation” as a moment mired in verbal and physical violence against Jews and, implicitly, the Roma population. Thus, the film confronts the audiences with a reenactment of the killing of Jews but also, and more significantly, a reenactment of the coming into being of the “nation” in its “purified” form, through the foundational killing and deportation of Jews and Roma during WWII. Based on these two references, the film proposes the anti-Semitism and anti-Roma racism in Romania during the Holocaust as a crucial moment when ideas about national identity crystallised.

And finally, the film itself provides a third reason for the report’s limited impact: it shows how facts on their own, however well documented, cannot compel a public consensus even within a culturally homogenous group.

²⁹ Emanuel Copilaș, *Națiunea Socialistă. Politica Identității În Epoca de Aur* (Iași, Polirom, 2015), p. 156.

³⁰ D. W. Griffith, *The Birth of a Nation*, film (USA, 1915)

Archival Sources and the logic of *dispositif* in “*Barbarians*”

In this section, I turn to Adrian Martin’s reappraisal of the notion of *dispositif* rooted in apparatus-theory to provide a framework for my analysis of the film. I argue that the relation between the film and audience as foregrounded by “*Barbarians*” as *dispositif* is crucial for revealing the impossibility of mobilising historical truth in order to forge public consensus in relation to a contested historical past.

In contrast with Jude’s earlier work, *Aferim!*³¹ in particular, “*Barbarians*” is striking in the heterogeneity of the material that it incorporates, such as archival footage, written eyewitness testimony, historical and philosophical writings, and official historical reports both old (war time telegrams and cabinet notes) and recent (the Final Report on the Holocaust) – rather than through its spectacular, black-and-white visual and aural compositions, that is, its *mise en scène*. Nevertheless, the mixing of various media is not characteristic of “*Barbarians*” alone. It is worth mentioning that *Aferim!*, the first film to approach the issue of Roma slavery in the Romanian provinces in the 19th century, uses archaic Romanian from a multitude of literary and historical sources to create its dialogue. In *Țara moartă / The Dead Nation*³² a series of archival photographs taken from the Costica Acsinte collection, a photographer from Slobozia active between 1937-1946, is juxtaposed with a soundtrack made up of radio broadcasts of the times, documenting the rise in anti-Semitism in Romania and extended quotes from the diaries of Emil Dorian, a Jewish doctor who had lived in Bucharest read by Radu Jude himself.

The presence of various forms of media in Jude’s earlier work provides the opportunity to discuss the intermedial character of his films. For example, Judit Pieldner describes *Aferim!* as “a hypermediated patchwork of diverse medial representations that can

³¹ Radu Jude, *Aferim!*, film (Romania, Bulgaria, Czech republic, France, 2015)

³² Radu Jude, *Țara moartă*, film (Romania, 2017)

be best grasped in term of intermediality”³³. She uses the concept of intermediality to analyse the way in which the film “unfolds in the in-betweenness of the seemingly ‘natural,’ unmediated and the artificial, mediated.”³⁴ She argues that cinematic representation in *Aferim!* is on the border between the historically accurate (period *mise en scène*) and the artificial (literary dialogue in archaic Romanian). According to Pieldner, this functions to expose the artificiality and constructed character of film as a medium that Jude mobilises against any idea of realist representation of historical reality.³⁵

In contrast, I argue that “*Barbarians*” employs various forms of media that contribute to creating complex text-viewer relationships in order to allow the multivocality of the narrative to emerge. In this sense, recent theorizing on the *dispositif* provides a useful approach to analyse the effect on the spectator of the arrangement of heterogenous material in “*Barbarians*”. For Adrian Martin, *dispositif* is precisely “what replaces the traditional procedures of the *mise en scène*.”³⁶

In his chapter “The Rise of the *Dispositif*,” Martin reacts to “the rise of a new kind of film [...] that is based [...] on the logic of a *dispositif*”.³⁷ His formulation immediately suggests a departure from the prevalent film theoretical understanding of Jean-Louis Baudry’s *dispositif*³⁸, which gained currency in English-language scholarship as the theory of the “cinematic apparatus”.³⁹ For Martin, “the contemporary workings of the *dispositifs* can offer us a new entrée into rethinking the field of film aesthetics”⁴⁰ For his definition of the *dispositif*, Martin draws on multidisciplinary uses of the term. This includes Frank Kessler’s

³³ Judit Pieldner, ‘History, Cultural Memory and Intermediality in Radu Jude’s *Aferim!*’, *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies*, 13 (1) (2016), p. 96. I thank the anonymous reviewer for inviting me to reflect on this matter.

³⁴ Op. cit., p. 96

³⁵ Op. cit., p. 99-101

³⁶ Martin, *Mise En Scène*, p. 181.

³⁷ Op. cit., p. 179.

³⁸ Jean-Louis Baudry, ‘Le dispositif’, *Communications*, 23 (1) (1975), p. 56–72.

³⁹ Baudry’s “Effets idéologiques produits par l’appareil de base” (1970) and “Le dispositif: approches métapsychologiques de l’impression de réalité” (1975) are seen as the founding texts of the theory of the “cinematic apparatus.”

⁴⁰ Martin, *Mise En Scène*, p. 185.

return to Jean-Louis Baudry's *dispositif*,⁴¹ the political-cultural dimension of the term that originated with Michel Foucault⁴² and the influence of art criticism on the present use of the term in the work of Erika Balsom,⁴³ among others. In particular, art criticism provides an important connection between the original understanding of the *dispositif* and Martin's reappraisal of the term.

In his seminal texts, Baudry distinguishes between "*appareil de base*" and "*dispositif*."⁴⁴ *Appareil de base* consists of the tools and the machines of camera, projector, celluloid, photographic registration and so on, while the *dispositif*, as Martin suggests:

is instantly and necessarily more of a *social* machine, a set-up, an arrangement, or disposition of elements that add up to the cinema going experience: body in a chair, dark room, light from the projector hitting the screen.⁴⁵

Thus, *dispositif* originally referred to an arrangement of machinery necessary to produce (the technology) and to screen a film (the projector, the movie theatre), plus the spectator. Baudry refers to the "ideal" spectator and describes his position in relation to the film as "voyeuristic", that is sitting in the dark in a theatre and looking at the moving images as they are projected on a screen. At the time of the writing, Baudry considered the position of the spectator as unified and unifying and wrote only in relation to narrative films and a style that Bordwell and Thompson termed "classical cinema style".⁴⁶

Baudry's original understanding of the *dispositif* has been recently reconsidered in relation to changes in film viewing situations due to the proliferation of screens on which to watch films, new forms of digital distribution and exhibition, as well as new sites of

⁴¹ Frank Kessler, 'The Cinema of Attractions as Dispositif', in Wanda Strauven, ed., *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded* (Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2006), pp. 57–70.

⁴² Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (Brighton, Harvester Press, 1980).

⁴³ Erika Balsom, 'A Cinema in the Gallery, a Cinema in Ruins', *Screen* 50 (4) (2009), p. 411–27.

⁴⁴ Kessler, *Cinema of Attractions*; Martin, *Mise En Scène*.

⁴⁵ Martin, *Mise En Scène*, p. 188.

⁴⁶ David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

screening (the art gallery, the public square, etc).⁴⁷ Martin identifies another reason for expanding the use of the term in contemporary film theory and criticism, namely, the proliferation of films akin to conceptual art that, through their formal procedures, retain the logic of the *dispositif*. Thus, he contends that

The cinematic *dispositif* today is no longer apprehended in the abstract or ideal terms elaborated by Baudry in the 1970s – it is not a matter of some grand ‘cinema machine’ before or beyond the forms and contents of any specific film.⁴⁸

Martin proposes the inclusion of the analysis of film style into the workings of the *dispositif*. As he points out, theorizing of the *dispositif* by incorporating insights from art criticism offers the possibility of looking at the form and content of the artistic, cultural product itself whether conceptual art or film. Following Erika Balsom he suggests that “audiovisual works [...] also internally construct a system of relations between thoroughly heterogeneous elements.”⁴⁹

The idea of *dispositif* as resulting from the relations between heterogeneous elements deserves some unpacking. According to Balsom, in the context of Tacita Dean’s audiovisual works exhibited in galleries, vastly different elements are connected: (1) the space of the gallery with its economic and ideological determinations, (2) the material attributes of analogue film.⁵⁰ More importantly, she also includes (3) the work’s thematic preoccupations, its subject matter as part of the ensemble. She argues that Dean’s films “document physical ruins of varying sorts through the ruined medium of film.”⁵¹ Thus, Balsom’s articulation of a new *dispositif* of cinema creates a correspondence between film form (analogue) and content (a decaying building slated for destruction) within the space of the art gallery via the trope of ruin, central to Dean’s work.

⁴⁷ Erika Balsom, *A Cinema in the Gallery*; Kessler, *Cinema of Attractions*.

⁴⁸ Martin, *Mise En Scène*, p. 189, emphasis added.

⁴⁹ Op. cit., p. 189.

⁵⁰ Erika Balsom, *A Cinema in the Gallery*, p. 414

⁵¹ Op. cit., p. 421.

This inclusion of the form and content of the film into the *dispositif* forms the background against which Martin proposes a dual-level approach to the concept that would simultaneously draw on film theory as well as film criticism. He argues that “each medium has its own broad *dispositif* – arising from the mixture of aesthetic properties and socio-historical conditions – and each particular work can create its own rules of the game, its own *dispositif*.”⁵² For Martin

the ‘disposition’ (as the word [*dispositif*] is sometimes translated) usually announces its structure or system at the outset – in the opening scene, even in the work’s title – and then must follow through with it, step by step, all the way to the bitter or blessed end.⁵³

Martin also points out that “a *dispositif* is not a mechanistic or rigid formal system; it is more like an aesthetic guide-track that is open to much alteration, surprise and contradiction”⁵⁴ Thus, the concept opens up the possibility to look at formal elements such as direct address and framing in order to analyse the way in which they contribute to creating a relation between film-text and audience, which is not rigid but alters according to the variations of the *dispositif*.

Martin considers that “procedures are now at the centre of progressive world cinema.”⁵⁵ For Adrian Martin, “procedures” are strategies and tactics that originate in avant-garde and structural films and that are now also present in world cinema. He writes:

The *dispositif* strategies and structures used [...] include: numbered sections (and even numbered titles: *Five, Ten, Three Times, Three Stories*); intensive restrictions on

⁵² Martin, *Mise En Scène*, p. 189.

⁵³ Op. cit., p. 180.

⁵⁴ Op. cit., p. 192.

⁵⁵ Op. cit., p. 180.

camera angle and point-of-view; entire narratives structures built on a formal idea and its eventual, long-delayed pay-off [...].⁵⁶

Martin identifies a number of films that push the boundaries of creativity in the direction of avant-garde filmmaking or “art film” (films commissioned by or exhibited in art galleries) and considers them representative of what he terms “progressive world cinema,” suggesting that these films occupy a niche position even within world cinema. I argue that “*Barbarians*” firmly belongs to world cinema through its mode of production (transnational), consumption (targeting film festivals) and its procedure, which is made visible from the beginning.

“*Barbarians*” uses direct address and framing to create a pattern which structures the film’s relation with its audience from the beginning. This pattern is not static, it changes as it develops. I identify this procedure as “film-within-film”, having as its variations the “image-within-image,” “screen-within-screen,” and “spectacle-within-spectacle”. The strategy, of actors or characters who “appear to acknowledge our presence as spectator; they seem to look at us”⁵⁷ is commonly referred to as direct address. As Tom Brown argues, direct address has been appropriated for counter-cinema (as an alternative to Hollywood filmmaking) and it has been mostly theorised in relation to the films of Jean-Luc Godard, where it has been celebrated for its thematic and political directness.⁵⁸ Indeed, initial reviews of the film associated “*Barbarians*” with the political modernism of Godard’s films, among others.⁵⁹

I adopt Brown’s method, who argues for closely attending to individual films in order to evaluate particular instances of direct address, in order to differentiate the function of direct address in “*Barbarians*” from the conventional understandings of the use of direct

⁵⁶ Op. cit., p. 180.

⁵⁷ Tom Brown, *Breaking the Fourth Wall: Direct Address in the Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), x.

⁵⁸ Op. cit., p. 8.

⁵⁹ Jessica Kiang, ‘Film Review: “I Do Not Care If We Go Down in History as Barbarians”’, *Variety* (July 2, 2018), <https://variety.com/2018/film/reviews/i-do-not-care-if-we-go-down-in-history-as-barbarians-review-1202863055/>; Andrei Gorzo and Veronica Lazăr, ‘Un modernism politic updatat: Radu Jude și “Îmi este indiferent dacă în istorie vom intra ca barbari”’, *Vatra* (July 2, 2018), <https://revistavatra.org/2018/07/02/veronica-lazar-si-andrei-gorzo-un-modernism-politic-updatat-radu-jude-si-imi-este-indiferent-daca-in-istorie-vom-intra-ca-barbari/>.

address in counter-cinema.⁶⁰ I argue that instead of anchoring its protagonist as the main guiding force, direct address establishes her authority and centrality only to gradually erode it by allowing other, often contradictory viewpoints to coexist in the film's narrative. Throughout the film other characters express their viewpoint on the past as "undercurrents" that ultimately undermine the predominant viewpoint as established through direct address. As I show later on, the notion of *dispositif* is thus helpful for identifying the means through which the film thwarts spectatorial expectations as established by the use of direct address. This betrayal of expectations has a function that becomes particularly explicit in the last part of the film, the reenactment as "spectacle-within-spectacle."

Reenactment as a practice is common in documentaries as well as fiction films. In the context of documentary film practice, Bill Nichols rightly points out that the distinction between re-enactment and enactment "dooms the reenactment to its status as a fictionalized repetition of something that has already occurred."⁶¹ In contrast, in the context of fiction films, Ivone Margulies considers the dramatized repetition of an event as a "rite of realism", which reveals the tension between documentary and fictional elements in reenactment.⁶² Both authors emphasise the fictionalised, dramatic element of reenactment against notions of (documentary) realism. The reenactment in "*Barbarians*" complicates this relationship between fiction and "realism" further by reenacting a massacre, an act that directly problematises the possibility of re-doing the massacre in order to be recorded, and by framing it as a "spectacle-within-spectacle."

I argue that the reenactment constructs multiple spectatorial positions and subjectivities that counter an abstract, unified and unifying spectator, as conceptualised by

⁶⁰ Brown, *Fourth Wall*, p. 11.

⁶¹ Bill Nichols, 'Documentary Reenactment and the Fantasmatic Subject', *Critical Inquiry* 35 (1) (2008), pp. 73-74.

⁶² Ivone Margulies, 'Exemplary Bodies: Reenactment in Love in the City, Sons, and Close Up', in Ivone Margulies, ed., *Rites of Realism* (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2003) pp. 220.

Baudry. The audience within the film world is not represented as a homogenous mob but as comprised of a multitude of individuals whose reactions to the show are far from uniform. In this way, the reenactment plays a significant part in revealing the impotence of historical didacticism – even as spectacle – to build consensus.

Reenacting a massacre: thematic focus in “*Barbarians*”

“*Barbarians*” won the Chrystal Globe, the Grand Prix at the Karlovy Vary festival in 2018. The film dramatises the process of making a show from its planning and rehearsal stages to its “live” performance. Mariana Marin (Ioana Iacob), a theatre director, together with Traian (Alex Bogdan), her collaborator, prepare a show that will be staged and performed; this performance appears in the last 30 minutes of the film. The film does not offer any precise information regarding the occasion for which the spectacle is being organised. Nevertheless, there is a sense of momentousness given by the historical weight of the location (The Revolution Square in Bucharest) and by the presence of the Deputy Mayor who delivers a speech before the spectacle. Based on the time of the year, summer, and the content of the show, it is possible that the European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Fascism celebrated on 23rd of August is the unnamed occasion of the spectacle. In Romania under communism, on 23rd of August large-scale celebrations of the Party and its leader, Ceaușescu were organised across the country. The memory of these mandatory celebrations is probably why 23rd of August is not officially observed in contemporary Romania. While at the European level the collapsing the victims of two authoritarian regimes into one category does not seem to be problematic, in Romania, the almost exclusive focus on anti-communism obscured the country’s involvement in the Holocaust, a situation thematised by the film.

The film “documents”, in an episodic, fragmentary manner, various stages of Mariana’s process of staging the massacre of Jews in Odessa by the Romanian Army during

WWII. First, Mariana and her team hire non-professional actors who play soldiers in the Romanian, German and Russian army and civilian Jews. Then, she examines archival photographs in order to choose the appropriate images and slogans to use in the show, and, together with Traian, rehearses battle scenes, including the bombing of the Romanian headquarters in Odessa that sparked the large-scale retaliation against the Jews. The film makes a point of Mariana's hiring Roma people among the non-professional actors, the latter complaining about performing alongside Roma in the show. In this way, the film emphasises the fact that the Roma were also victims of the Holocaust and racism emerges as much an issue of the past as of the present.

The subject matter of the planned spectacle antagonises most of the people involved in it. Throughout the film, Mariana has to justify, over and over again, choosing this episode from Romanian history. She is constantly challenged by other characters in the film: her lover, some of the non-professional actors and Movilă, the town hall representative. With dogged persistence, Mariana successfully stages the show, including the killing of Jews at Odessa. The show takes place with unexpected results for Mariana: the effect of the spectacle is undetermined and the audience do not react as she was hoping.

This is not the first film to deal with the memory of the Holocaust in Romania. Radu Mihaileanu's *Train de Vie*⁶³ is probably the most well-known. Radu Gabrea's documentary, *Struma*⁶⁴, and his feature film, *Călătoria lui Gruber / Gruber's Journey*⁶⁵ are also notable examples. Radu Jude's own contribution to memorialising the Holocaust includes the documentary *Țara moartă / The Dead Nation*⁶⁶ which preceded "*Barbarians*."

There is a significant difference between these earlier approaches and Jude's film. *Train de Vie* tells its narrative from the point of view of the Jews, while *Gruber's Journey*

⁶³ Radu Mihaileanu, *Train de Vie*, film (France, Belgium, Netherlands, Israel, Romania, 1998).

⁶⁴ Radu Gabrea, *Struma*, film (Romania, 2001).

⁶⁵ Radu Gabrea, *Călătoria lui Gruber*, film (Hungary and Romania, 2008).

⁶⁶ Radu Jude, *Țara moartă*, film (Romania, 2017).

adopts the point of view of an Italian, who arrives in Romania to look for Gruber, a Jewish doctor killed during a pogrom. In contrast, through its characters, “*Barbarians*” focuses on the majority of ethnic Romanians who are represented as diverse and multivocal. Some are deniers, while others, Mariana and her team in particular, want to confront the racist ideology of the past, however uncomfortable. By including archival materials, such as photographs and written documents, the film exposes this racist ideology as representative of the official position of the Romanian government during WWII. In this way, the film does not question the possibility of knowing the facts of the massacre in Odessa: it reflects on historical truth’s fragility in the face of propagandistic manipulation, which is doubled by an awareness of the role media, film included, can play in this process.

“Barbarians” as *dispositif*: an analysis

In this section, I analyse characteristic sequences in the film in order to show how direct address and framing as part of the film’s *dispositif* structure the relation between film-text and spectator. I analyse this relation as established by direct address and elaborated further in relation to the inserted archival materials. Instead of establishing one dominant perspective as suggested by the use of direct address, the film as *dispositif* constructs a multiplicity of, often contradictory, perspectives. These viewpoints emanate from the characters and from archival materials. Direct address and framing do not work independently from characters or archival sources. On the contrary, these elements combine to create a heterogenous ensemble that includes the spectator.

As a general rule, the film uses the same device or procedure more than once and each time with a different result. The notion of *dispositif* as constantly changing is helpful in showing how subsequent uses of the same technique actually contribute to creating the multiplicity of perspectives as part of the film’s strategy to reveal truth as multifaceted.

In this section, I first analyse the film's use of direct address, before turning to the "image-within-image" and "screen-within-screen" techniques, in order to show how framing archival photographs provides "evidence" of the massacre and contributes to developing a multiplicity of perspectives. I then turn to the "spectacle-within-spectacle", which confirms the multiple spectatorial positions. The multiplicity of perspectives we encounter in the preparation stages and the multiple spectatorial positions that emerge during the actual show together convey the film's message: truth alone cannot provide consensus in relation to an event whose dominant understanding is rooted in political erasures across long periods of time.

Direct address

Direct address is used very early in the film, within a mobile and fluid long take that lasts approximately four minutes. It is a complex shot in the film and direct address describes only a small part of it. The camera explores the location, roaming freely through rooms and corridors of the National Military Museum without being attached to any of the characters or a particular position. The shot boldly displays the technology and the crew involved in recording. It reveals technical equipment, microphones, cameras, recording monitors, which are not usually visible. It records both actors and crew members. In this way, two spaces, usually kept separate, behind and in front of camera, are connected from the beginning, in a way that resonates with Martin's conception of the *dispositif*.

The camera seems to accidentally find a group of people among the technical instruments that surround them. A woman tells a joke that we only partially hear. The camera tilts toward the right away from the group and frames a display of old military gear. The punchline of the joke is delivered off-screen. The woman walks in front of the camera and faces it. A clapperboard slate, with the working title of the film visible, the name of the director, Radu Jude and cameraman, Marius Panduru legible, signals the "proper" beginning

of the shot. The actress Ioana Iacob looks at us and introduces herself as Mariana Marin, an ethnic Romanian, Christian Orthodox woman. She also lists the names of other actors who will play in the film. Mariana is interrupted and whisked away by her fictional assistant not before turning again to the camera to say “enjoy the film!” The shot goes on for more than two minutes to show Ioana Iacob assuming her role as Mariana and attending to her first task as the director of the show: selecting the non-professional actors. In this way, the world of the film and the world of the spectators are also connected through direct address. The spectators are invited to rely on Mariana to help them navigate this complex world.

Direct address draws in the spectator and contributes to creating a connection between Mariana and the audience. This powerful early shot creates the impression that Mariana’s perspective is privileged within the film world. In this way, the film emphasises her central role and authority from the beginning. As I will show, after this early shot the film’s *dispositif* works against this impression: Mariana’s authority does not remain unchallenged and, consequently, the relation between the film and spectator gains new inflections as the film progresses.

As previously noted, the same device is used more than once in the film. Two different characters address the audience. Much later in the film, but before the show, Traian looks at us while he theatrically cites from a political speech from 1941 including the very sentence that Jude chose for the film’s title. The second time it is used, direct address connects form (direct address) with content (archival material) rather than character. In the context of the film as *dispositif*, the way in which “*Barbarians*” incorporates the quote is significant. Direct address here does not establish Traian as a privileged perspective over or above Mariana’s. The device is employed to confront the spectators with the information provided by the quote – the official anti-Semitic policy. This speech is recorded in an official

archival document and as such it is one of the media that the film uses in order to remind us of the official, governmental position towards the Jews at the time.

The shot's narrative purpose is to "document" Traian's attempt to remind Mariana of her intention to include this quote in the show. Alas, the reminder comes too late for the quote to be included in the show. The significance of the quote is downplayed within the world of the film, while, in fact, it provides the title of the film, a title that up until this point was mystifying. Its significance as evidence of the official political views of the time is heightened by the fact that the same political speech is included in the Final Report on the Holocaust written by the International Commission in 2005.⁶⁷

Framing archival photography

Archival footage (still and moving imagery) figures prominently in the film. For the purposes of this paper, I will refer only to the use of archival photography to examine how framing archival photographs creates the "image-within-image" and "screen-within-screen" procedure. Sequences featuring archival photography are narratively motivated as belonging to Mariana's research for her show. Therefore, Mariana as a character plays an important role in these shots. Her presence seemingly contributes to emphasising her role as a guiding force for the spectators. The two instances that I will refer to establish a pattern of framing archival photography producing a *dispositif*, an arrangement of formal and content related elements that is not rigid but includes variation.

Archival photographs representing victims of nationalist violence are incorporated in the film's narrative according to a pattern: extensive dialogue sequences precede and /or follow them. Framing is significant for establishing the procedure, the conceptual design foregrounded from the beginning of the film. "*Barbarians*" starts with a classic "film-within-

⁶⁷ ICHiR, *Final Report*, p. 125.

film” situation, showing within a black screen a propaganda film, an archival footage of the occupation of Odessa by the Romanian army in 1941.

As with the film, the archival photography never fully occupies the screen. The camera frames the image in such a way that the margins retain the surface on which the image is placed (a table, the bed) preserving its relative autonomous status as still image within the static image of the film (fixed frontal framing) contributing to creating an “image-within-image” structure. This procedure of filming a photograph brings to the fore the issue of the role of photography, in film. As Raymond Bellour argues in his essay “The Film Stilled”, the presence of stilled images in a number of films function as an interruption of movement⁶⁸. He refers to these images as “the freeze inside the image”⁶⁹ (101) or, more pertinently for us, in relation to Rossellini’s *La Macchina ammazzacattivi / The Machine for Killing Bad People* (1948)⁷⁰ as “images in images”⁷¹. As Bellour explains, these instants that still the film fascinate the viewers because they “possess a quality of abstraction and of irreality that seems to introduce a kind of paralysis [...] into film”⁷². On the one hand, he analyses Rossellini’s *The Machine for Killing Bad People* and its “strange principle of rephotographic the photograph”⁷³ in order to show that

as a result of being incorporated into the image [...] the photos attack that much more the unicity of the film movement based on the linking and the equal distance between the snapshots⁷⁴.

On the other hand, Bellour points out that this principle is narratively motivated in the film. After a visit from a mysterious old man, the village photographer gains special powers. Every

⁶⁸ Raymond Bellour, ‘The Film Stilled’, *Camera Obscura* 8 (3) (1990), p. 99-124. I thank Glyn Davis for bringing this point to my attention.

⁶⁹ Op. cit., p. 101

⁷⁰ Roberto Rossellini, *La Macchina ammazzacattivi*, film (Italy, 1948)

⁷¹ Bellour, *The Film Stilled*, p. 107

⁷² Op. cit., p. 108

⁷³ Op. cit., p. 106

⁷⁴ Op. cit., p. 107

time he re-photographs an old image, the people or animals that he focuses on, die. Bellour argues that these stilled images

make cinema lean in the direction of photography, towards its power to inscribe death. All the more so when they are directly supported, as in Rossellini's film, by a re-representation of photography, and when the significant effect of the stilled image is stipulated by the scenario or its theme⁷⁵.

In this way, the relationship between the procedure and the narrative content of the film is emphasised. Bellour's analysis of the images in images in Rossellini's film shares similarities with the "images-within-images" in *"Barbarians"*. On the one hand, these "images-within-images" on which the camera lingers for a varying amount of time, they reflect on the conception of medium specificity not only via the presence of photography but also through emphasising the material attributes of analogue film (i.e. grainy image). At a narrative level, these communicate the undeniability of the atrocity through what they represent. On the other hand, as part of a longer or shorter sequence, the same images are dynamically mixed together with other elements of the film and contribute to destabilising Mariana's perspective by allowing other perspectives to emerge and reveal the composite nature of the truth regarding a historical event.

The first such photograph is an image of "the hanged in Odessa" as labelled in the film, while the second represents victims of the pogroms. In the first case, Mariana and Ilinca, her assistant, are sitting at a desk in a room at the National Military Museum in Bucharest, the site of official memory *par excellence*. Mariana picks up an image, reads its title, and, together with Ilinca they examine it and talk about the possibility of using it in the show. The next shot shows the image with the margins of the desk clearly visible.

(Fig. 1 "The hanged in Odessa" Reproduced by courtesy of Radu Jude)

⁷⁵ Bellour, *The Film Stilled*, p. 108

The photo, framed in this way, is shown on the screen for one minute while the conversation is still ongoing. Ilinca goes through anti-Semitic slogans and the women identify one to project during the show. Then, for thirty seconds the image is on display without any conversation on the soundtrack. The absence of dialogue on the soundtrack has the effect of burning this image of the men hanging into the viewer's retina. In this way, the photograph functions as an indisputable proof of the atrocity, emphasising the evidentiary value of such archival material, part of the official memory as preserved in the National Military Museum.

In the case of the second photo, Mariana is at home with her lover. Before the image is shown and for almost the entire time that the image is on screen, Mariana and her lover debate the issue of Jewish Pogroms in Romania, while leafing through a photo-album containing similar images. This time, the image depicting people lying dead on a pavement in front of a house is on display without dialogue only for about ten seconds. While the image serves a similar evidentiary function, the dialogue adds to the function of the shot.

Mariana expresses outrage at the sight of civilians probably murdered by their neighbours and her inability to comprehend the widespread Romanian anti-Semitism at that time. In response, her lover, Șerban Pavlu's unnamed character, jokingly remarks that at the time Romanians were only part of the wider European anti-Semitism. This commentary foregrounds the idea of anti-Semitism as a common 'European value' and Romania's uncritical adherence to it. It also hints at a more recent Romanian integration, this time in the European Union (EU). This reference may be a subtle commentary on the Romanians' eagerness to follow the dominant trend instead of exercising critical thought. At the same time, the joke relativizes the intolerant, anti-Semite and anti-Roma, racist nationalism characteristic of the times. In this way, the film shows that Mariana's outrage is one possible response among others to historical evidence of nationalist violence.

The same procedure is further varied in my last example of the use of archival photography in the film. Compared to the previous instances, this sequence is made up of a single shot (rather than two or more consecutive shots) and is remarkable due to its complexity and short duration (ten to fifteen seconds). The photography is never shown on its own and the situation is not preceded by a dialogue sequence. The camera is static for the duration of the shot and it frames Mariana in the foreground with her back to the camera and the Carol I Royal Foundation Palace in the background. Mariana raises her left hand holding a photograph and “matches” it against the Palace. Then she raises her right hand holding her mobile phone and takes a snapshot of the image against the palace. Framing here contributes to creating a multi-layered perspective that includes the historical building, the photograph, its re-presentation on the digital screen of the phone and Mariana in the same image.

(Fig. 2 In front of the Royal Palace. Reproduced by courtesy of Radu Jude)

The archival photography is right in the middle of the frame emphasising the central significance of this element in the image. In the photograph, ordinary people, women and men gathered in front of the palace, do the Nazi salute. This shot encapsulates one of the concerns of the film: to confront the spectator by showing how fascism was not only the official political view of the Romanian state, it also had local support. As Bellour surmised in relation to *Journey to Italy*⁷⁶, this image in front of the Royal Palace “becomes for the film a meaningful instant as much because it contains in itself the entire film as because it creates movement and affinities between some of these moments.”⁷⁷

Mariana is in front of a landmark building in the Revolution Square in Bucharest. The shot underlines the politico-historical significance of the building, located in the Revolution Square where Mariana plans to stage the reenactment. The square itself has a multi-layered history. The buildings that delineate its sides are connected to either the monarchical past,

⁷⁶ Roberto Rossellini, *Viaggio in Italia*, (Italy, France, 1954)

⁷⁷ Bellour, *The Film Stilled*, p. 110

such as the Royal Palace, the Carol I Royal Foundation Palace (represented in the shot), or its communist past, such as the former Central Committee building from where Nicolae Ceaușescu delivered his last speech. The name of the square memorialises the most significant event in recent Romanian history, the anti-communist Revolution of 1989. Post-communist memorialisation favours heroism and obliterates the fascist connotations of the location.

The reenactment framed as “spectacle-within-spectacle”

The reenactment takes place in the last 30 minutes of the film. This time, Jude’s film frames Mariana’s show, which structures the reenactment as a “spectacle-within-spectacle,” a variant of the “image-within-image” procedure referred to above. The show is a live multi-media event, which includes the projected image of the Romanian flag adorning Antonescu’s portrait, performed in front of a ‘live’ audience, in other words a spectacle. The fact that the technical equipment, such as cameras, microphones, and recording monitors are also visible emphasise the complexity of the arrangement.

(Fig. 3. The reenactment. Reproduced by courtesy of Radu Jude)

The reenactment marks a shift in register in the film, from a documentary “making of” register to full-blown spectacle. This spectacle is described by Mariana as a “stylised, compressed, theatrical” representation. The show dramatises the massacre of Jews and prioritises elements that pertain to spectacle and entertainment (light, music, militare parade) over the documentary aspects. Mariana’s spectacle represents only one attempt at addressing this shameful historical episode, the massacre of Jews; Jude’s film is another. As previously suggested, “*Barbarians*” undermines the educational potential of Mariana’s show by including the audience and their reactions in the narrative.

The in-between character of the reenactment, fiction and documentary, problematises the status of the spectators who appear in the film. Are they actors or characters? Are their

reactions scripted and rehearsed (fiction) or an on the spot response to the spectacle? This distinction is further complicated by the use of medium shots and close-ups in contrast to the panoramic views that frame the show. The close-ups and medium shots focus on the individual members of the audience. The keen observer identifies the filmmaker himself, Radu Jude, a theatre director, Gianina Cărbunariu, and some of the actors who appear in the film as members of the audience. On the one hand, their presence might be financially motivated, they simply supply more bodies in the crowd. On the other hand, their presence makes the distinction between actors and characters even more difficult.

Even if we consider the spectators as characters and their reactions as scripted, the sequence retains an ambiguity in relation to spectatorial reactions. It is difficult to know what they are actually reacting to. For example, when the three armies march in, the German, the Romanian and the Soviet Russian, the spectators unanimously cheer the arrival of the German and the Romanian army and boo the Russian. To what extent is the unanimous cheer a reaction to the Nazi German Army or to Germany as the most powerful member of the EU and a favourite emigration destination? To what extent is it an expression of support for the fascist Romanian army or patriotism? The entry of the Soviet army is unequivocally booed which may reflect the general perception according to which communism in Romania was a foreign, Soviet, imposition. Despite the ambiguity, these reactions clearly show that not all the diegetic spectators react in the same way.

Before concluding, I zoom in on a problematic moment in the show in order to identify multiple spectatorial positions based on audience reactions. The killing by burning is visually the most spectacular as well as the most disturbing part of the show. On the one hand, the attraction of the spectacular burning flame abstracts the image from its narrative content, the killing that it represents, and draws in the spectator based on sight alone. On the other hand, not all spectators react in the same way.

(Fig. 4 Pretty flames. Reproduced by courtesy of Radu Jude.)

Some are seemingly enjoying the spectacle, recording the visually striking moment of the flames engulfing the wooden barn on their mobile phones, visibly enthralled. Some appear more reflective and critical of the attraction of the spectacle and more aware of what it represents, the reenactment of a massacre. In this way, the reenactment constructs multiple spectatorial positions: (1) some are interpellated by the views that are displayed and are less critical, (2) some are more aware and potentially more critical, (3) some express support for the Jewish victims in the show.

To conclude, *“Barbarians”* departs from Baudry’s understanding of the spectator as unified and unifying and constructs multiple spectatorial positions that chime with the multiplicity of perspectives provided by characters and the use of heterogenous materials. These multiple spectatorial positions work against the idea of criticism as confrontation – as initially suggested by the film through the use of direct address. Mariana’s viewpoint is constantly and effectively decentred.

This paper has shown that the way in which the film embeds in its narrative the very diverse material sources (written as well as visual) follows a rule and creates a procedure that I have described as a variation on the more familiar “film-within-film” procedure. Regarding the purpose of this procedure, I argue that the film incorporates and allows multiple perspectives to coexist in order to emphasise the fact that access to “evidence” is necessarily mediated and can only provide a fragmentary, limited view, which needs to consider, given the context, the influence of multiple hermeneutical frameworks that have shaped a community’s common sense of the past. The final reenactment matches these frameworks to a multiplicity of spectatorial positions, whose responses are informed by the characters’ age, gender, class, employment status, upbringing, rural or urban environment, social and political curiosity and awareness, etc.

The achievement of the film is to offer, instead of a unitary, unique perspective, a composite view that successfully combines multiple sources (written and visual-auditory; old and new) that challenge the perpetuation of hegemonic perspectives as developed by communist and post-communist historiography. *“Barbarians”* creates a fissure, it drives a wedge in the consolidated, overly familiar narrative of Romania’s ‘just’ war, fought to “liberate Romanian territories” rather than acquire new ones, and Antonescu as a saviour of Jews. In this sense, the film does not attempt to redeem the narrative of the Final Report but instead exposes any narrative’s fragmentariness and dynamic temporality, its capacity to transform and be transformed according to the needs of the present, in more or less complicitous ways with the violence of the past. In the process, the film does not provide a moral evaluation that condemns, as its critical force is less direct and more reflective: it highlights the incapacity of “truth” to muster a moral consensus via its mere availability.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mihaela Mihai, Glyn Davis, Maša Mrovlje and the anonymous reader for their readings, comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this article. Research for this paper was funded by the European Research Council, Stg. 637709-GREYZONE.

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